

Family Support for Reserve Component Soldiers in Extended Deployments

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Chief, National Guard Bureau
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This is our report on the audit of Family Support for Reserve Component Soldiers in Extended Deployments. The audit focused on the processes used by the Reserve Component for providing support to the families of its soldiers in extended deployments.

We have incorporated the official Army position on the conclusions and recommendations. The verbatim comments are in Annex C.

I appreciate the courtesies and cooperation extended to us during the audit.

FOR THE AUDITOR GENERAL:

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Joyce E. Morrow".

JOYCE E. MORROW
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For more information about this audit, please call the Forces and Manpower Management Audits Division at (703) 681-9595. For extra copies of this report, please call (703) 681-9863.

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| <i>No. There are no Army regulations that prescribe the policies and procedures for providing family support to the Reserve Component. However, both the National Guard and Army Reserve have established guidance relative to family programs, but neither component's guidance identified key management controls.</i> | |

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INTRODUCTION

WHAT WE AUDITED

We audited the Family Support Programs of the Reserve Component. The audit focused on whether adequate processes were in place for providing effective support to families of Reserve Component soldiers during extended deployments.

RESULTS IN BRIEF

The Reserve Component had processes in place to provide support to reservists and their families during extended deployments; however, improvements were needed to enhance support services. Both the National Guard and U.S. Army Reserve took actions to prepare soldiers and their families for upcoming deployments by providing family briefings and information packets. However, the Reserve Component couldn't be assured that all family members were sufficiently informed. Attendance for briefings wasn't always documented, and Army Reserve families that didn't attend a briefing weren't mailed an information packet on available benefits and services. In addition, the Reserve Component could improve how it maintained communications and support with families during deployment by leveraging methods already being used. We found that:

- Newsletters weren't always published and distributed monthly to families of soldiers deployed and when published didn't always contain the most relevant information.
- Internet sites didn't always provide consistent, useful, and readily accessible information.
- Video teleconferencing wasn't effectively used in assisting families to communicate with deployed family members.

The Reserve Component also didn't have a complete and consistent process to record, monitor, resolve, and prevent conflicts. Although the National Guard provided central points-of-contact that took calls from families when problems arose, and tracked and recorded those calls until they were resolved, it didn't analyze the information to use it to anticipate and prevent the same problems from reoccurring. The Army Reserve didn't have an effective conflict-resolution process in place.

The Reserve Component also needed to establish a process to measure the effectiveness of its Family Support Program. We found that surveys were conducted infrequently. And, when conducted, actions weren't taken to improve Family Support processes. Furthermore, the Reserve Component needed to evaluate its infrastructure for providing Family Support. Based on the organizational structure of the Army Reserve and National Guard, both activities may be relying too heavily on volunteers to provide the necessary support to families.

Command generally agreed with our recommendations to correct these conditions.

BACKGROUND

During the past 10 years, the Army has gradually increased its reliance on the Reserve Component. In the past, the National Guard and Army Reserve were available to primarily provide support in time of war. But the decrease in the Active Component force structure has placed more reliance on the Reserve Component. Both the National Guard and Army Reserve often deploy in key roles to supplement the active force in virtually every domestic and overseas mission—from disaster relief in CONUS, to humanitarian assistance in Central America, to peacekeeping operations in Bosnia and Kosovo. In fact, the most recent rotations in Bosnia and Kosovo have had the Reserve Component serving as the lead. In addition, as a result of the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks, the reliance on Reserve soldiers has further increased. To fight the war on terrorism, the Army had mobilized and deployed about 35,000 soldiers as of 25 September 2002.

Given the demanding pace of military operations, soldiers need to be able to focus on their mission free of worry about the welfare of their families. DOD recognized this need and took steps to establish and enhance family programs to address the needs of families with soldiers deployed. To assist in addressing these needs, DOD established DOD Instruction 1342.23 and the Guard and Reserve Family Readiness Programs Toolkit. The DOD Instruction, dated 29 September 1994, implements general policy, assigns responsibilities, and prescribes procedures for Reserve Component family programs. The Readiness Programs Toolkit was established in September 2001. It provides more detailed guidance for the Reserve Component to use in implementing and managing its family programs.

To ensure program effectiveness, the DOD Instruction required the National Guard and Army Reserve to develop Service-specific policies and

procedures to govern the family program process. Also, the instruction was intended to ensure Reserve Component soldiers and their family members are prepared and adequately served by the individual Service's family care systems and organizations for the contingencies and stresses associated with deployment.

RESPONSIBILITIES

The Chief, National Guard Bureau has overall responsibility for the Family Support Program in the National Guard. Within the Office of the Chief, National Guard Bureau the Family Program Office is responsible for facilitating ongoing communication, involvement, support, and recognition between the National Guard and its soldiers and families. As it relates to family support, the Office of the Chief, through its Family Program manager, is responsible for providing policies, guidance, technical assistance, and consultation to support the development and implementation of a National Guard Family Program within each State. The office also identifies and designs training and awareness support and provides it to soldiers and their families.

The U.S. Army Reserve Command is responsible for ensuring the readiness and preparedness of its forces to mobilize and deploy to a wartime theater of operations. The Commanding General of the Reserve Command concurrently holds the positions of the Deputy Commanding General, Forces Command for Reserve Affairs and the Chief, Army Reserve (DA element). Within the Reserve Command, the Family Program Office is responsible for providing family readiness programs that promote self-reliant soldiers and families. The Chief, Family Programs provides policies, guidance, technical assistance, consultation, and training for implementation and sustainment of the program for Army Reserve soldiers and their family members. The Family Program Chief also provides oversight and program evaluation, and ensures that management controls are in place and operational.

* * *

We have incorporated the Army's official position on the conclusions and recommendations. The verbatim comments are in Annex C.

**OBJECTIVES, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS,
COMMENTS, AND OFFICAL ARMY POSITION**

A - FAMILY SUPPORT PROGRAM

OBJECTIVE

Does the Reserve Component have adequate processes for providing support to the families of its soldiers in extended deployments?

CONCLUSION

Generally yes. The Reserve Component had processes in place to provide support to reservists and their families during extended deployments; however, improvements were needed to enhance support services. Both the National Guard and U.S. Army Reserve took actions to prepare soldiers and their families for upcoming deployments by providing family briefings and information packets. However, the Reserve Component couldn't be assured that all family members were sufficiently informed. Attendance at briefings wasn't always documented, and Army Reserve families that didn't attend a briefing weren't always mailed an information packet on the available benefits and services. In addition, the Reserve Component could improve how it maintained communications and support with families during deployment by leveraging methods already being used. We found that:

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Our detailed discussion on these conditions starts on page 13. Our recommendations start on page 28.

BACKGROUND

Family programs are intended to develop strong, self-reliant families that can withstand the rigors when family members deploy for extended periods. DOD Instruction 1342.23 provides policy, assigns responsibilities, and prescribes procedures for Reserve Component family programs. The DOD instruction provides general guidance and instructs each component to develop specific policies and procedures to govern their family programs to ensure program effectiveness. National Guard Regulation 600-12, National Guard Family Program, dated 8 January 1986, governs the Army National Guard's program. U.S. Army Reserve Command Regulation 608-1, Family Readiness Handbook, dated 1 August 2000, governs the U.S. Army Reserve Family Program.

To provide support to the families of its deployed soldiers, the National Guard Bureau has a headquarters element, led by the Chief, Family Programs, that provides guidance and oversight to family coordinators assigned within each State and territory. The responsibility of each family coordinator is to manage the effective implementation of the family program within their area of responsibility. Family coordinators are generally assisted by volunteers to provide family assistance. Also, when necessary, the Army National Guard will use Active Duty Special Works soldiers during contingencies to assist with family program functions. Each State or territory may have one or more assistance centers established to further support its family members. The number and locations of the centers are determined by each State and are intended to provide support to families in close proximity to their residences.

The U.S. Army Reserve also has a Chief for its Family Program. This individual is assigned to the Headquarters, U.S. Army Reserve Command. This office also provides family support guidance and

oversight. Within the U.S. Army Reserve Command structure there are 10 CONUS Regional Readiness Commands, each of which have a regional family program director. Each director is responsible for coordinating family support for all personnel assigned to units within their command, which covers multiple States. Through volunteers, the regional program directors provide family support guidance to each unit mobilized. The volunteers run the program at the unit level without any direct assistance from the regional director. Army Reserve unit commanders appoint Family Readiness liaison soldiers at units to assist the lead volunteers in accessing any required military information. All volunteers are required to sign an agreement and participate in annual training.

DISCUSSION

In this section we discuss:

- Family Readiness and Support.
- Needs Assessment.
- Family Support Infrastructure.

Family Readiness and Support

The Reserve Component needs to improve its processes for enhancing the support provided to the families of its soldiers in extended deployments. DOD found that when families are prepared, informed, and supported, they are better able to function successfully during deployments. And family readiness directly impacts on military readiness. To improve family readiness, DOD placed emphasis on ensuring that reservists and their families were prepared to cope with the strains associated with long and repeated deployments. Furthermore, once deployed there needs to be an effective network to maintain communication throughout the deployment. DOD coordinated with and issued guidance to the Army to ensure that the National Guard and Army Reserve were included in Total Force family readiness planning and implementation. During the audit we reviewed the programs of the National Guard and Army Reserve and the processes each had in place to support the families of deployed soldiers. We found that although each component was taking actions to implement the program, there were areas that could be improved in preparing families for upcoming deployments, and maintaining communications and support during deployments.

Preparing Families

Both the Army National Guard and Army Reserve took actions to inform family members of their entitlements while their family member was deployed; however, their processes didn't ensure all family members were informed. To prepare families for upcoming deployments, the Guard and Reserve provided family briefings and information packets covering pertinent topics. These briefings are essential for preparing the soldiers and their families for deployment since many family members are unfamiliar with the military lifestyle and generally aren't aware of all the services available to them. Preparing families requires a constant effort. Families should be briefed at least annually on the available services and resources to assist in resolving problems while their family member is deployed. Furthermore, upon notification of mobilization, every effort should be made to reinforce the support available.

We visited six State National Guard activities and eight Army Reserve units (subordinate to two Regional Readiness Commands) and spoke to the family program coordinators, directors, and volunteers. Generally, we were told that both the National Guard and Army Reserve conducted annual briefings with their soldiers and families. These briefings usually occurred in connection with unit holiday parties or picnics. Also, we found evidence that each component conducted family briefings just prior to mobilization to prepare families for upcoming deployments. To determine how successful these briefings were at informing the soldiers and their families, we reviewed the attendance rosters (indicating the number of soldiers and family members attending) and the agendas of the meetings (indicating the topics covered). Our review found that attendance rosters were available at four of the six Guard activities and only one of the eight Army Reserve units. Only one State's attendance roster indicated about 100 percent attendance by soldiers. The same roster also showed about 40 percent attendance by family members. Because attendance documentation wasn't available at all locations our analysis wasn't fully comprehensive. Also, by not having this information the units couldn't determine which of their soldiers and families needed information on benefits and services.

We were able to obtain family briefing agendas from 7 of the 14 activities visited. Documentation showed program coordinators, commanders, volunteers, and guest speakers from military and industry participated in the briefings to provide attendees with information, covering all pertinent topics including:

- Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System.
- Medical benefits.

- Pay issues.
- Legal issues.
- Red Cross.
- Coping with separation.
- Employer support for the Guard and Reserve.

Information packets provide additional information on the many topics discussed at the briefings and provide contacts for when questions arise. DOD also recommended including a pre-deployment checklist to serve as a tool to allow soldiers and their families a means to identify those areas that require more attention or support. We found that all of the sites we visited at the National Guard and Army Reserve had handouts that covered all the required topics. Also, each component had its own respective checklist that, if used, would assist the reservists and their families in preparing for deployment. All six of the Guard sites we visited told us they provided packets to the soldiers and their families at the briefings and mailed out packets to those families that didn't attend. In fact, one site mailed out the packets prior to the briefings trying to motivate the families to attend the briefings. It appeared to have worked since that State had the highest family member attendance for those sites providing attendance rosters. However, we also found that not all Army Reserve families were assured of receiving a packet. During our visits to the units we found that only two of the eight Reserve units we visited, said they mailed packets to families that didn't attend the pre-deployment briefings. We were told that resources weren't available for mailing the packets. As a minimum, information packets should be mailed to all families that don't attend pre-deployment briefings to ensure they have the necessary information to prepare for deployment.

We address the actions needed to help ensure all families are informed of the benefits and services available to them while their family member is deployed in Recommendation A-1.

Maintaining Communications and Support

The Reserve Component maintained communications and support with families during deployment of family members, but improvements could be made. DOD policy requires that the Army ensure its reservists and families be adequately supported during deployment. To ensure adequate support is provided, the Reserve Component needs to communicate sufficient and timely information to the soldiers and their families to:

- Keep them informed of current happenings relating to the deployed family member's assignments.
- Provide continued updates on benefits and services available.
- Assist in the resolution of conflicts that may arise as a result of, or in connection with, the reservist's military service.

We found that the Reserve Component:

- Provided, where possible, toll-free call services for soldiers to call their families.
- Used newsletters and leveraged other technological sources—Internet, e-mail, and video teleconferencing—to communicate to the soldiers and their families as well as allowing soldiers and families to communicate with each other.
- Assisted in the resolution of conflict.

However, we found that improvements could be made in some of these areas to further enhance communications.

Newsletters. Reserve Component activities generally published and distributed newsletters to the families of soldiers deployed; however, the information wasn't always provided in a timely manner and in some instances the information could have been more comprehensive. Newsletters are one aspect of family readiness that can relay up-to-date information to keep families informed of available benefits and services, various planned activities to bring families together, and information on what their family members are doing while deployed. The newsletters can help promote unity among Reserve soldiers and their families by providing a communication link to reduce social isolation—allowing family members to realize they aren't alone and there are others experiencing similar challenges. Thus the timing and the content of the newsletters are important.

Our review of Family Program guidance found that DOD and Reserve Component guidance supported using newsletters; however, only the Army Reserve addressed newsletter frequency. The Army Reserve Command Regulation 608-1 states that newsletters should be sent quarterly during non-mobilization periods and monthly when reservists are deployed. Timely updates, preferably monthly, while reservists are deployed would keep families better informed and be more effective in helping families feel less isolated. Although most of the activities we visited told us that they sent out newsletters on a frequent basis, we were only able to obtain copies of newsletters from 7 of the 16 activities

visited (three State Guard activities, two Regional Readiness Commands, and two Army Reserve units). Of those seven activities, four sent out monthly newsletters. The remaining three activities sent out newsletters no more than four times a year.

We also evaluated the content of the newsletters to determine if they provided useful information to soldiers and their families. As part of this evaluation, we identified the following criteria that should be included, at a minimum, in program newsletters:

- Family social gatherings.
- Informational briefings.
- Updates and changes to benefits and services.
- Family program points of contact (names, telephone numbers, and/or e-mail addresses).
- Unit information of deployed family member.

We reviewed copies of the published newsletters made available to us and found that none of the newsletters addressed all of the criteria. Only 3 (1 State Guard and 2 Reserve activities) of the 16 activities published newsletters that met at least 4 of the 5 criteria. In order for newsletters to be an effective tool to disseminate information and promote a sense of belonging for families, they should be sent out monthly and should address relevant information.

Technology. The Reserve Component needed to place more emphasis on using available technology for communicating with family members. DOD recognizes that technology is vital in linking reservists, family members, and Family Support Program staff. Two technological capabilities the Reserve Component can further capitalize on are Internet sites and video conferencing.

Internet Sites. The Reserve Component was using the Internet to disseminate information, but additional emphasis was needed to provide more consistent, useful, and readily accessible information. Traditional paper-based methods and command briefings are generally more costly and weren't always provided to all family members. Consequently, use of the Internet can provide the Reserve Component with an economical and highly efficient means of disseminating information to more families. An effective website should allow an individual with minimal computer skills to easily navigate through the site and provide, at a minimum, the following information:

- Family Program background (for example, mission and goals).
- General information on benefits and services available with links to the appropriate website for more specific information.
- Key points of contact (name, location, phone number, and e-mail address).
- General military information to help families unfamiliar with the military to navigate through the system. For example, location of military installations where they can obtain benefits and services, military ranks for dealing with military personnel, and mobilization information to better understand their current deployment situation.

We found that the Reserve Component didn't take full advantage of this medium. Both the Army Reserve (<http://www.army.mil/usar>) and the National Guard (<http://www.ngb.army.mil>) have a website. The Army Reserve site is the central point to find family support information for the Army Reserve. The National Guard Bureau has established a separate website specifically geared to the National Guard Family Program (<http://www.guardfamily.org>), that includes both the Army and Air Guard. This website is readily accessible from the National Guard home page. We reviewed the Army Reserve and the National Guard Family Program websites and found that although there were some similarities, the National Guard's website was much more effective. The following chart shows how the two websites compared in relation to ease of use and information provided:

| Minimum Requirements | National Guard | Army Reserve |
|----------------------------------|---|--|
| Ease of Navigation | Relatively easy. The National Guard Family Program site is easily located from the National Guard site. The Family Program site is user friendly and visually appealing. | Complex. Family Program is not easily identified on the Army Reserve home page. It is found within the "Resources" section. Selecting the family information moves the browser into a myriad of links. This requires searching to find all the related Family Program data that is available. |
| Family Program Background | Provides sufficient information. In addition to the mission, the site provides detailed information about the Family Program. Also the site includes hyperlinks that provide additional details if needed. | Doesn't provide sufficient information. The site doesn't explain the family program. It is basically a network of links. |

| Minimum Requirements | National Guard | Army Reserve |
|--|--|--|
| General Information on Benefits, and Services | Provides sufficient information. The site provides information on all benefits and, in many instances, hyperlinks for more specific information. Key benefits are readily accessible from the home page. | Provides sufficient information. The site provides benefit information through a number of avenues. |
| Points of Contact | Provides sufficient information on name, location, phone number, and e-mail links for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Guard Bureau Family Program Office. • State Coordinators. • Family Assistance Centers. | Provides sufficient information on name, location, phone number, and e-mail links for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Army Reserve Family Program Office. • Regional Readiness Command Family Support offices. |
| General Military Information | Provides sufficient general information and related links for things such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Link to post information. • Military Rank (with related web links). • Information on Mobilization. | Doesn't provide enough general information. It provides some information on mobilization but doesn't provide location of installations and information on the military ranks (only provides history of enlisted rank insignia). |

To capitalize on this technology for providing current and useful information, the Army Reserve should update its website to make it more user friendly.

We also checked the Internet to determine if there were websites for the Army National Guard Headquarters, the six State Guards, and two Regional Readiness Command sites we visited. We found websites for all nine activities. As a source for family support information, the Army National Guard Headquarters website (<http://www.arng.army.mil>) met only a few of the minimum requirements and didn't have a link to the National Guard Family Program website. Not having this link and not having adequate information could create some communications problems with soldiers and their families. The remaining sites weren't specifically designed for the Family Support Program but were the websites for each State Guard and Regional Readiness Command. Of the eight sites, four provided users with adequate family program information and had a link to the family support section on their home page. The remaining four sites only provided vague references to family support that were difficult to find at times. Also, of the six Guard sites, only one site had a link to the National Guard Family Program website. These sites, at a minimum, should have provided a link to family program information on their home page, a brief explanation of their Family Support Program, and a link to their parent website.

Video teleconferencing. The Reserve Component used video-teleconferencing capabilities on a limited basis to link families with their deployed family members. DOD encourages the use of video-

teleconferencing as one means to support interconnectivity between families and soldiers to help reduce the stress of separation and improve morale. To emphasize this support, in FY 99 DOD recommended that \$1.8 million in contingency funds provided to the Reserve Component be used to support interconnectivity in support of military personnel and readiness requirements for overseas contingency operations. The National Guard used most of its contingency funds to purchase video-teleconferencing equipment; however, the Army Reserve used its funds to purchase other technology and related equipment. During the audit we evaluated the use of video teleconferences during the tenth Stabilization Force rotation for Bosnia. We found that although conditions were conducive to using this equipment for linking families, it was used very little. This was because an effective process wasn't in place to allow for increased video-teleconferencing. Also, the Army Reserve didn't promote the use of it, and the National Guard only partially promoted its use.

We were told that the National Guard informed soldiers and their families of the availability of video teleconferences during their pre-deployment family briefings. However, we didn't find any indication that the Guard said any more of its availability during deployment. We found little evidence that many of the soldiers and their families were aware of this benefit. The 6 States we visited during the audit had 58 video-teleconference units. We found that usage was restricted to some extent because of the limited capability in Bosnia, and because it was up to the soldier to initiate the process by coordinating the effort—requesting the communications prior to the requested date and notifying family members of the scheduled video teleconference. However, we found that only one State maintained any type of usage log. The State had 12 video-teleconferencing units and provided us the usage log for 2 of the units. According to the logs, 14 calls were initiated and completed between October 2001 and February 2002. When trying to determine the reason for the low usage during the rotation, one State coordinator told us that most of the deployed soldiers and family members preferred to use other means of communication such as e-mail and toll-free telephone calls to communicate with each other. Although we agree that communicating via e-mail and telephone calls would be more timely and efficient on a day-to-day basis, we also believe that seeing and talking to family and friends on special occasions—such as holidays, birthdays, and anniversaries—would further enhance morale.

As part of our audit we also found that one State, during an earlier Stabilization Force rotation, maintained sign-in sheets and, after each video-teleconferencing session produced after-action reports synthesizing what occurred to include the number of family members who attended. For the 6-month rotation period, there were 45, 2-hour sessions scheduled at 10 locations with video-teleconferencing capabilities. We obtained copies of the after-action reports for three of the sessions. The reports showed that 218 family members attended the sessions. This

State's video-teleconferencing equipment was more frequently used than the States involved in the tenth Stabilization Force rotation. This higher use could be attributable to their more organized approach for using video-teleconferencing. This State had a video-teleconferencing point of contact in Bosnia who scheduled times when the soldiers were available to use video-teleconferencing usage. Units then signed up with times and locations for the families to attend the video teleconferences scheduled. Having a process in place allowed for a more effective use of video-teleconferencing.

Conflict Resolution. The Reserve Component didn't have a complete and consistent process to record, monitor, resolve, and prevent conflicts. Generally, once a family member is deployed, questions arise from those family members left at home. These questions involve benefits and services available, as well as, problems being experienced with receiving adequate support. DOD requires that programs be established to assist in the resolution of conflicts that arise as a result of, or in connection with, the Reserve member's military service. We found that the Army National Guard and Army Reserve treated conflict resolution differently.

National Guard. The National Guard provided central points-of-contact for family members to call when problems arose, maintained logs of the calls, and tracked each call until they were resolved. However, the National Guard didn't analyze the information from the logs to use it to anticipate and forestall similar problems in the future. The six State National Guard activities we visited told us they had a process in place to record, track, and resolve conflict. The family program personnel located at the assistance centers were responsible for documenting incoming calls from soldiers and their family members and the actions they took to resolve the issues. We were only able to validate the existence of a formal process at five of the six States because program personnel at the remaining State couldn't provide us with copies of its call logs. Our review of the 5 State call logs—maintained between September 2000 and November 2002—revealed 2,090 initial telephone calls were received identifying 2,550 issue areas. Most of the logs were updated to reflect that the issues were resolved and often indicated the actions taken. We categorized the calls into the following broad subject areas of concern, with the number of times each area was referenced in the following table:

| Subject Area | Frequency Issue Raised |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Finance | 370 |
| Medical/Dental | 251 |
| Employment | 63 |
| Paperwork | 245 |
| Support/Readiness Groups | 248 |
| Miscellaneous | 41 |
| Legal Issues | 171 |
| Army Services | 499 |
| Family/Home Issues | 233 |
| Contact | 429 |
| Total | 2,550 |

The areas of concern fluctuated among the States, but overall the two most common areas of concern dealt with identification cards (124 calls under Army Services) and TRICARE (113 calls under Medical/Dental). This type of information could be a useful source when assessing issue areas needing attention; however, we didn't find any evidence that the State Guard analyzed the data in the logs to determine trends or systemic problems. Nor was the information surfaced to the National Guard Bureau to allow for any detailed analyses. To obtain the most benefit from the call log information, the National Guard should analyze the data and look for systemic issues.

Army Reserve. Army Reserve Family Program personnel didn't actively participate in resolving conflicts. The Army Reserve didn't provide central points-of-contact that were responsible for resolving conflict. Instead, at pre-deployment briefings, the Army Reserve provided a list of pertinent areas and the corresponding agency point of contact for each area. If a problem or question surfaced, the reservists and their families were supposed to call the related agency point of contact. If they would call the family program office for assistance, family program personnel or program unit points of contact merely referred callers to other agencies that family program personnel felt were best suited to address the caller's issue. No calls were recorded or tracked to resolution. As a result, there was no way to determine the number of issues that surfaced, if problems were resolved, or if overarching issues had developed. The Army Reserve needs to require its program directors and unit personnel to take a more active role towards assisting families with areas of concern. Doing so will allow family program directors to identify areas where actions may be warranted to improve family support.

We address the actions needed to improve communications and support of families in Recommendations A-2 through A-5.

Needs Assessment

The Army National Guard and Army Reserve didn't have a process in place to measure the effectiveness of their Family Programs for meeting the needs of the soldiers and their families. DOD Instruction 1324.23 requires the Reserve Component to monitor the effectiveness of its activities in responding to the needs of their soldiers and their family members. Our review found that although the National Guard and the Army Reserve did collect some data, there wasn't a process in place that clearly defined what needs should be assessed, and when the assessments should occur. Also, we were unable to find any instances where the results were used to improve the Family Programs. Neither the National Guard Family Program regulation nor the Army Reserve Readiness Handbook defined the requirements. By not clearly identifying the needs of their soldiers and families, the Family Support Programs weren't assured that they were meeting those needs.

Prior Assessments

To have an effective program, the Reserve Component must constantly gauge its effectiveness by collecting and analyzing information. During our review, we were able to find the results of three component-wide assessments done over the last 7 years—one each by Army Reserve, National Guard (limited to three States), and DOD. These surveys confirmed that weaknesses in Family Programs existed. A synopsis of the purpose and focus of the surveys follows:

| | Army Reserve | National Guard | DOD |
|--------------------|--|---|--|
| Date | FY 96 | FY 01 | FY 99 |
| Purpose | How important are selected aspects of the Family Program and how good was the support provided during deployment? | Identify and obtain data on critical family readiness issues before, during, and after deployment. | How well are families supported during deployments? |
| Scope | 316 Army Reserve Soldiers | 839 National Guard Soldiers, spouses, parents, and children (out of 3,495 surveys sent) | 343 spouses of deployed DOD Reserve Soldiers (About 2/3 of respondents were Army Reserve and National Guard.) |
| Focus Areas | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demographic data • Before notification of deployment • After notification and before deployment • During mobilization/ deployment • Preparation for demobilization | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • TRICARE and Medical • Children • Before deployment • During deployment • After deployment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Background information • Pre-deployment preparation • Use of Military support services |

Army Reserve. The Army Reserve survey was conducted in FY 96 and showed that the current process, with a heavy volunteer support system, wasn't adequate to address issues identified in the survey. The Army Reserve's survey assessed the relationship between what aspects of the family program (during stages of deployment) its soldiers felt were important and the degree to which their needs were addressed. A total of 316 soldiers responded to questions addressing 31 support areas, and 1 open-ended question (What was the most significant issue in the Army Reserve Family Program today?). Soldiers rated each area twice, first rating the importance of the area and then rating the degree of satisfaction with that area. Ratings ranged from one (lowest) to five (highest). The variance between the two ratings was evaluated and then ranked. The respondents ranked the "Responsiveness of the unit to family needs" as the most significant area. Soldiers rated the element's importance at 3.8 and their satisfaction with the unit's performance at 2.3. Of all the elements rated, this element encompassed the basic purpose of the Family Program. The rating of this question, plus the fact that not one of the elements had an average performance rating of a three or above (survey average of 2.5), clearly indicated the respondents perceived the Army Reserve Family Program as needing improvement.

For many of the weaknesses we identified during this audit, there were related survey questions. The ratings given to these areas (range of 2.3-2.7) supported our conclusions that improvements were needed. For example, in preparing soldiers and their families for deployment, the soldiers rated pre-deployment briefings on Family Services at 2.6. The

area of communicating with families during deployment, through the use of newsletters, was rated 2.3.

National Guard Bureau. The National Guard Bureau also identified problems similar to those we identified earlier in the report. In FY 01, the National Guard Bureau contracted for a survey to gather data and document the “The Unintended Consequences of Deployment of Family Readiness.” The survey was conducted using interviews, focus groups, and survey techniques and targeted soldiers and family members from the States of Texas, Georgia, and Maryland. The survey was a series of questions designed to capture both quantitative information and individual experiences and perceptions prior to, during, and after deployment. There were 839 respondents to the survey. The results were provided from the perspective of the various groups—soldiers, spouses, parents, and children. The results indicated that the Family Program had shortfalls. For example:

- 54 percent of the soldiers said that pre-deployment briefings were generally held more than 30 miles from their homes and that 42 percent of their families didn’t attend a pre-deployment briefing.
- 71 percent of the spouses indicated that they received a newsletter infrequently, if at all, and they expressed a desire for more communications on what the deployed family members are doing and how they are.

The general conclusion from the survey was that the National Guard Family Program was critically under funded and relied too heavily on States, units, and volunteers to address the necessary issues.

DOD Survey. The DOD survey also supported our conclusions. In September 1999, the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense, Reserve Affairs and the DOD Office of Family Policy sponsored a survey to determine how reservists’ spouses gauged the support they received during deployments to Bosnia, Southwest Asia, and Kosovo. A total of 343 spouses—of which about two-thirds were from the Army Reserve and the Army National Guard—completed 34 questions relating to pre-deployment preparations and use of support services during deployment. For the same areas where we noted that improvements were needed, there were related survey questions. The results indicated there were problems with pre-deployment support and support during deployment. Some of the problems spouses noted in the survey follow.

- 29 percent didn’t attend family briefings or receive pre-deployment materials.
- 50 percent indicated that the units either didn’t send newsletters or they didn’t know about newsletters.

- 39 percent didn't know the military points of contact in the event of an emergency.

Actions Taken

Although the Reserve Component made some attempt to assess the needs of its soldiers and their families, their efforts were ineffective since they did nothing with the information collected. DOD, on the other hand, has been proactive since its survey trying to enhance family support. It has published a National Guard and Reserve Family Readiness Strategic Plan, a Guide to Reserve Family Member Benefits, and Guard and Reserve Family Readiness Toolkit. The survey results of the Army Reserve and National Guard identified issues that needed to be addressed. In fact, for the National Guard survey, the product from the contractor included six recommendations. However, we found that generally corrective actions had not been taken. There was no evidence that either component developed and implemented a plan to improve operations based on the results of their survey. It is important that the Reserve Component establish a process that will measure the effectiveness of their Family Program on a recurring basis. This process should establish a plan for addressing specific Family Program issues, as well as, ensure corrective actions are taken based on problems found.

We address the action needed to establish a process to measure the effectiveness of the Family Support Program in Recommendation A-6.

Family Support Infrastructure

The Reserve Component needed to evaluate its infrastructure for providing Family Support. As part of our review of the Reserve Component Family Program we evaluated the effectiveness of each organization in accomplishing the Family Support mission. Each component had a family support organizational structure based on its mission structure—State emphasis for the National Guard and Regional Readiness Command for the Army Reserve. Each component had a Family Program Chief responsible for guidance and oversight of the program and its subordinates. These full-time personnel were responsible for managing the Family Support Program within their component. The next level of support was established at the State level (coordinators) for the National Guard and Regional Readiness Command level (director) for the Army Reserve. Within the National Guard, States established family assistance centers at locations (armories) from which large numbers of soldiers deployed. At each assistance center, the State assigned a soldier on active duty to coordinate local efforts and to act as the Family Program point of contact. Volunteers provided assistance to

the active duty point of contact. We found that there were between 50 and 200 volunteers for each State we visited. State coordinators worked directly with family assistance center staffs and provided daily oversight of the program. The Army Reserve organization varied from the Army National Guard in that each director was responsible for a region encompassing multiple States. At each unit one volunteer Readiness Group Leader was assigned and was responsible for organizing the unit's volunteer network. The director provided training and support material to the group leader and unit volunteers. The directors relied on the volunteers to provide the majority of the support to the families at the unit. For those units we visited, between 3 and 15 volunteers were utilized at the unit level to oversee the Family Program. Also, Army Reserve unit commanders appointed a Family Readiness Liaison soldier at each unit to assist the group leader accessing any required military information.

Based on the organizational structure, volunteers are essential resources in the Family Support Program of the Reserve Component. However, because volunteers are not bound by working a specified number of hours each week, it can be difficult for the State coordinator or regional director to exercise control and ensure that the support provided is consistent and effective. The volunteers we interacted with during our site visits were very dedicated and helpful; however, they also had their own full-time busy lives—including jobs, families, and other responsibilities and interests. Based on the FY 01 National Guard Survey, discussed earlier in this report, the contractor questioned the Guard's degree of reliance on volunteers. A conclusion from the survey indicated that although the volunteers were dedicated and had good intentions, they simply weren't able to provide all of the services the families required. This was questioned even though the Army National Guard had more key positions filled by paid personnel to help provide consistent and effective support. And the Army Reserve relied even more heavily on volunteers than the National Guard. Unit volunteers were used extensively to handle the logistics associated with family briefings; for example, obtaining speakers and organizing the briefings. Volunteers conducted family briefings in lieu of program directors and handed out briefing packets to soldiers and family members. Because of the importance of the Family Program and the impact volunteers can have on the readiness of the soldiers, it is important that both the Army Reserve and National Guard evaluate their reliance on volunteers in implementing their Family Program.

We address the actions needed to evaluate the Family Support Program's reliance on volunteers in Recommendation A-7.

RECOMMENDATIONS. COMMENTS, AND OFFICIAL ARMY POSITION

Chief, National Guard Bureau and Commander, U.S. Army Reserve Command

A-1 Recommendation: Evaluate the process for disseminating information to soldiers and their families to determine the most effective method for relaying the necessary information. As a minimum, require units to:

- Monitor attendance of soldiers and their families at predeployment briefings.
- Ensure all families receive packets informing them of their benefits while their family member is deployed.

Command Comments: The National Guard Bureau concurred with the recommendation. Forces Command Regulation 500-3-3 states that this requirement is a command responsibility and part of the Soldier Readiness Process (SRP). The Soldier Readiness Process Checklist has an entry to validate/record family member attendance, activation of the Family Readiness group and telephone tree. At the present time, the checklist is not automated, which makes it difficult and very time-consuming to track this information. With the release of the Reserve Component Automated System Mobilization Planning Data Viewer Version II in FY 04 (the exact date has not been announced), the process will greatly improve their validation of those family members who have attended the training. It will also identify those family members who should be contacted and sent information packets. While the Guard's goal is to notify 100 percent of the families, this is unrealistic with the current funding and unit personnel. However, they will issue an all-States letter re-emphasizing the need to document family member attendance at meetings and those to whom information packets were provided. This will be accomplished by 31 December 2003.

The Reserve Command concurred and told us that the unit Commander will provide a unit roster at each Soldier and Family Mobilization Briefing to serve as a sign-in sheet. Packets will be mailed to those family members who are not in attendance unless the Soldier in attendance delivers the information to his or her family. Each Soldier is required to fill out a Reserve Mobilization

Sheet during the briefing. Also, the Family Readiness Liaison will initiate activation of the telephone tree to ensure receipt of materials and to solicit issues or concerns. The Family Program Office will know whether or not family members attend briefings based upon the information the Soldier provides on the Mobilization Sheet. The Family Program Office will develop the contents of mobilization packets to ensure the same information is being provided consistently throughout the Army Reserve. A Soldier and Family Deployment Guide was published in April 2002. Projected target date for completing process evaluation is 30 September 2003.

A-2 Recommendation: Take actions to have newsletters published and distributed on a monthly basis to all units mobilized or deployed and their families. As a minimum, the newsletters should include:

- Family social gatherings.
- Informational briefings.
- Updates and changes on Family Program benefits and services.
- Family Program points of contact.
- Activities of deployed family members.

Command Comments: The National Guard Bureau concurred with this recommendation and has made significant improvement in this area. Up until the current military operation, there hasn't always been a focus on benefits and entitlements for the National Guard soldiers and their families as it relates to their day-to-day activity as a mobilized soldier. The National Guard Family Program Office began providing a weekly electronic newsletter in February 2003 to the State Family Program Coordinators. It is called "News You Can Use" and has information that covers Well-Being Issues, Medical and Dental Readiness, and training information. The Family Program Office has seen an increase of newsletters from the State Family Programs and also Family Readiness Group. The National Guard Family Program plans to evaluate the State Family Programs to determine the number of States currently creating a monthly newsletter. This will be completed no later than fourth quarter FY 03.

The Reserve Command concurred with the recommendation and said that Family Program staff at each Regional Readiness Command will prepare and distribute a monthly newsletter to families during deployments. The newsletters will contain information gathered from deployed units on experiences, best practices, and upcoming meetings and training that is pertinent, current, and up-to-date. The Reserve Command also stated that Reserve Family Readiness Groups are encouraged to compile and distribute monthly newsletters to the families in the unit during deployment. Projected target date for completion is 30 September 2003.

A-3 Recommendation: Make better use of the Family Program website for communicating with mobilized soldiers and their families. As a minimum:

- Evaluate and update, where considered necessary, websites to make them more user friendly.
- Have each primary website provide appropriate information relating to the Family Program. To include at least the following:
 - Family Program background (for example, mission and goals).
 - General information on benefits and services with links to the appropriate website for more specific information.
 - Key points of contact (name, location, phone number, and e-mail address).
 - General military information—for example, location of military installations, military ranks, and mobilization information. In many instances this may involve setting up hyperlinks to sites that would provide more specific information.
 - Have States and Regional Readiness Command establish a link to Family Program information on their homepage.

Command Comments: National Guard Bureau concurred with this recommendation. The National Guard's www.guardfamily.org website is comprehensive, user friendly, and has many state of the

art features. They have continued to improve and update our National Guard Family website to include a comprehensive online solution that covers emotional health issues like stress, depression, anxiety, insomnia and substance abuse, as well as helping with family and work, health and fitness, and financial and legal issues. The Family Program Office has also developed a website for our National Guard Youth, with information on the effects of deployments, health and fitness, a help section with topics on homework, career exploration, college preparation, guard benefits, and scholarships. There is also on-line training, which includes subjects on how to handle stress, money matters, and dealing with violence. The Office has developed a monthly newsletter, which may be downloaded from the site. The site is www.guardfamilyyouth.org.

The Reserve Command concurred and said that Reserve Family Program website will be created. The site will be accessible to Soldiers, family members, and volunteers and will have links to other pertinent websites. Links to the new website will be easily identifiable on the home pages of Army Reserve Commands, Regional Readiness Commands, and Major Subordinate Commands. Projected target date for completion is 31 March 2004.

- A-4 Recommendation:** Establish a process that will make better use of video-teleconferencing equipment in assisting families to communicate with deployed family members. As a minimum, identify which mobilization/deployment sites can support video teleconferencing and require that procedures be established for improving the linking of soldiers with their families.

Command Comments: The National Guard Bureau concurred with this recommendation. The Guard Bureau is improving the operational capability of the network and is developing a video teleconferencing users guide for OCONUS video teleconferences. Currently the capability exists (within operational and security constraints) to provide OCONUS video teleconference to CONUS families. However it is up to the States to determine use of this capability. The target completion date for the user's guide is 30 April 2004.

The Reserve Command concurred and said the Command Information Management staff will conduct a survey to determine the locations and availability of video-teleconferencing equipment, and coordinate use of the equipment. This management staff will

also coordinate use with the deployed unit. Projected target date for completion is 31 March 2004.

A-5 Recommendation: Direct Family Program Chiefs to evaluate their current processes for addressing soldier and/or family member concerns and make changes, where considered necessary, to ensure that, at a minimum:

- Processes are in place and operating for documenting, monitoring, and resolving issues identified by soldiers and their family members.
- Data documenting the issues that need to be corrected is evaluated for trends.

Command Comments: The National Guard Bureau concurred with this recommendation. With the release of the Reserve Component Automated System Mobilization Planning Data Viewer Version II in FY 04 (the exact date has not been announced), units will have an automated system that maintains family information, creates telephone trees, mailing labels, document training hours, and volunteer hours. It will also create an intake sheet to track and monitor issues from beginning to end. The program will also generate reports for tracking, documenting, and evaluating trends at the unit level and higher.

The Reserve Command concurred and said procedures were established in the Family Issues Memorandum dated 14 March 2003. Family members were made aware of the procedures, and actions are ongoing to educate more Soldiers and families about the process. The servicing Family Program Office will address any issues requiring immediate attention. Projected target date for full implementation of a resolution process is 30 September 2003.

A-6 Recommendation: Establish a process to measure the effectiveness of the Family Support Program. As a minimum:

- Establish a plan for addressing specific Family Program issues on a recurring basis.
- Ensure that actions are taken to correct problems identified from studies and surveys conducted.

Command Comments: The National Guard Bureau concurred and stated that it is developing an Accreditation process to measure the effectiveness of the Family Readiness Program. A legal review of the process will begin no later than the second quarter FY 04 and implemented by the first quarter FY 05. The Guard Bureau also stated it agreed that there was a need to address specific Family Program issues and to ensure actions are taken to correct those problems. They've initiated and participated in several studies and surveys for this purpose to include the capability for online surveys and websites that are ongoing. What we are not able to do is to provide the personnel to facilitate and correct the issues that are identified.

With the addition of the new Army Family Team Building and Army Family Action Plan staff position, we will be able to educate more soldiers and family members. Immediate issues and concerns will continue to be handled by our State Family Programs and our Army National Guard Family Assistance Centers.

The Reserve Command concurred and said that surveys will be developed for the planned Family Program website to continually evaluate and monitor the effects of the Family Program Office in meeting Soldier and/or family needs. The Office will provide trends to the Family Program Staff for adjustments and improvements to the program. The projected target date for completion is 31 March 2004.

- A-7 Recommendation:** Evaluate the impact volunteers have in implementing the Family Program. Determine whether more full-time personnel are needed to make the program more effective.

Command Comments: The National Guard Bureau concurred with this recommendation. The Guard continues to program for additional funding for full-time personnel, and need emphasis and aggressive support from the Army and DOD in order to accomplish this critical requirement. The Guard has websites, 1-800 numbers, training, and marketing products, but is lacking people. While volunteers have always been the backbone of family programs, the military requirements since 11 September 2001 have escalated far beyond the capability of what was at one time a volunteer program.

The Reserve Command concurred and stated a request for additional full-time personnel was requested to assure the effectiveness of the program and minimize the sole reliance on

volunteers. Projected target date for completion is 31 December 2004.

Official Army Position: The National Guard Bureau and the Army Reserve Command, as the official Army position, agrees with the conclusions and recommendations included in this report.

B – MANAGEMENT CONTROLS

OBJECTIVE

Does the Army regulation that prescribes the policies and procedures for family support identify key management controls?

CONCLUSION

No. There are no Army regulations that prescribe the policies and procedures for providing family support to the Reserve Component. To ensure program effectiveness, DOD Instruction 1342.23 required the Reserve Component to develop service-specific policies and procedures to govern the Family Program process. In compliance, the Army Reserve established a Family Readiness Handbook; however, the National Guard took no action to update its previously established regulation. The following is the guidance the National Guard and Army Reserve established to govern its family program.

- National Guard Regulation 600-12, National Guard Family Program, dated 8 January 1986.
- U.S. Army Reserve Command Regulation 608-1, Family Readiness Handbook, dated 1 August 2000.

The existing National Guard regulation doesn't address the Army management control program nor does it identify key management controls. And although the Army Reserve regulation does address the management control program, the regulation doesn't identify key management controls. During our audit of the Family Support Program for the Reserve Component, we identified management control weaknesses that are discussed in detail in Objective A.

ANNEXES

AUDIT SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

We performed the audit:

- From July 2001 through May 2003.
- In accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards and included tests of management controls that we considered necessary under the circumstances.

The audit covered transactions representative of operations current at the time of the audit. During the audit, we:

- Interviewed Reserve Component Family Program Chiefs, State Family Program Coordinators, Regional Family Program Directors, key operations personnel, and key budget personnel.
- Visited two U.S. Army Reserve Regional Readiness Commands, eight Army Reserve units, and six State National Guard activities. We evaluated Family Support operations and discussed the program with key personnel.
- Coordinated with the Chief, Information Management, U.S. Army, Europe to determine the video-teleconference process in effect for soldiers stationed in Bosnia on extended deployments. Also, to determine the number and operability of video-teleconferencing equipment available for soldiers use in communicating with family members in the United States.
- Reviewed and evaluated DOD and DA guidance to determine process requirements and compared guidance for similarities, differences, and compliance.
- Reviewed Management Decision Packages and applicable congressional, DOD, DA, and FYs 00, 01, and 02 Reserve Component funding and regulatory guidance.
- Evaluated Reserve Component FYs 00, 01, and 02 funding authorization documents, funding requirements, and congressional actions that impacted family support networks.
- Reviewed and analyzed National Guard contracts relative to family support to determine feasibility of amounts spent.

- Reviewed contractor surveys and studies performed relative to family support and evaluated survey results to determine relevance, if any, of actions taken.
- Compared family support processes between the Army National Guard and Army Reserve and between State Guard Family Program Coordinators and Regional Readiness Command Program Directors to determine compliance and correlation.

ACTIVITIES INCLUDED IN THE AUDIT

Office of the Chief, National Guard Bureau

Office of the State Adjutants General

Virginia Army National Guard

Connecticut Army National Guard

Georgia Army National Guard

Maryland Army National Guard

Massachusetts Army National Guard

Mississippi Army National Guard

Texas Army National Guard

Office of the Chief, Army Reserve

Headquarters, U.S. Army Reserve Command

81st Regional Readiness Command

345th Military Intelligence Battalion

803rd Quartermaster Company

2125th Garrison Support Unit

314th Public Affairs Detachment

99th Regional Readiness Command

367th Military Police Company

443rd Military Police Company

465th Transportation Company

345th Military Intelligence Battalion

OFFICIAL ARMY POSITION/VERBATIM COMMAND COMMENTS



REPLY TO
ATTENTION OF

DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
HEADQUARTERS, UNITED STATES ARMY RESERVE COMMAND
1401 DESHLER STREET SW
FORT MCPHERSON, GA 30330-2000

AFRC-IR (36-2c)

12 June 2003


MEMORANDUM FOR US Army Audit Agency, Office of the Deputy Auditor General, Forces and Financial Management Directorate, 3101 Park Center Drive, Alexandria, VA 22302-1596

SUBJECT: US Army Audit Agency (USAAA) Audit of Family Support for Reserve Component Soldiers in Extended Deployments, Draft Audit Report: F1-105C/A-2001-FFF-0253.000

1. We are enclosing our Command Comments to the subject draft report.
2. Uniformity and accountability are vital components in taking care of USAR soldiers and families. The USAR goal is provide support during all periods of military separations. Each Regional Support Commander or Major Subordinate Commander is responsible for Family Programs at their level and can create individual challenges that may lead to inconsistencies in our program delivery system. The USAR is taking steps to implement an Accreditation process that will aid in this area and create a standardized support template.
3. If you have any questions or need additional information, please contact Mr. John Price at (404) 464-8191 or email him at pricejoh@usarc-emh2.army.mil.

FOR THE COMMANDER:

Encl


JAMES A. KELLEY
Brigadier General, USA
Chief of Staff

- Monitor attendance of Soldiers and their families at redeployment briefings.
- Ensure all families receive packets informing them of their benefits while their family member is deployed.

USARC Comments. Concur. A unit roster will be provided by the unit Commander at each Soldier and Family Mobilization Brief listing the soldier's name and serve as a sign in sheet for mobilization packets to be kept on file by the servicing Family Program Office. Commanders will make attendance at these briefings mandatory for soldiers and strongly encourage the attendance of their family members. Packets will be mailed to those family members who are in not in attendance unless the soldier will deliver to his/her family. Activation of the Telephone Tree to ensure receipt of materials and to solicit issues or concerns will be initiated and conducted by the Family Readiness Liaison (FRL) or Rear Detachment Officer (RDO) to all family members whether in attendance or not logging information as outlined in the Family Issues Memorandum dated 14 Mar 03. The USAR Family Program Office will develop the contents of mobilization packets to ensure the same information is being provided consistently throughout the USAR. A Soldier and Family Deployment Guide was published in Apr 02. Projected target date for completion is 30 Sep 03.

Recommendation A-2. Take actions to have newsletters published and distributed on a monthly basis to all units mobilized or deployed and their families. As a minimum, the newsletters should include:

- Family social gatherings
- Informational briefings
- Updates and changes on Family Program benefits and services
- Family Program points of contact
- Activities of deployed family members

USARC Comments. Concur. Each Family Readiness Group (FRG) is encouraged to compile and distribute a newsletter to the families in their unit on a monthly basis during deployments. We know our volunteers are not always doing this due to inexperience, feeling overwhelmed or life demands. The Family Program Staff at each Regional Support Command will prepare and distribute a newsletter to deployed family members containing pertinent, current and up-to-date information gathering input from the deployed units on experiences, best practices and upcoming meeting and trainings. This action may require additional funding to cover the cost of postage fees. Projected target date for completion is 30 Sep 03.

Recommendation A-3. Make better use of the Family Program website for communicating with mobilized Soldiers and their families. As a minimum,

- Evaluate and update, where considered necessary, websites to make them more user-friendly.
- Have each primary website provide appropriate information relating to the family program. To include at least the following:
 - Family Program background (missions, goals, etc.)
 - General information on benefits and services with links to the appropriate website for more specific information.
 - Key points of contact (name, location, phone number and electronic mail address).
 - General military information -- e.g. location of military installations, military ranks and mobilization information -- in many instances this may involve setting up hyperlinks to sites that would provide more specific information.
- Have States and Regional Support Commands establish a link to family program information on their home page.

USARC Comments. Concur. A software package is being purchased and a Webmaster identified to create a USAR Family Program website. Family members, volunteers and soldiers will be able to access this website through their Army Knowledge Online (AKO) accounts. Links to other pertinent websites such as TRICARE and Employee Support of the Guard and Reserve (ESGR) will be made available. As easily identifiable link will also be available on the home pages of Army Reserve Commands, Regional Support Commands, and Major Subordinate Commands. Projected target date for completion is 31 Mar 04.

Recommendation A-4. Establish a process that will make better use of video-teleconferencing equipment in assisting families to communicate with deployed family members. As a minimum, identify which mobilization/deployment sites can support video-teleconferencing and require that procedures be established for improving the linking of Soldiers with their families.

USARC Comments. Concur. A survey will be conducted through the Information Management staff to determine locations and availability of video-teleconferencing equipment. Coordination for video-teleconferencing will be done through the Information Management staff, the FRL or RDO and the deployed unit. Projected target date for completion is 31 Mar 04.

Recommendation A-5. Direct Family Program Chiefs to evaluate their current processes for addressing Soldier and/or family member concerns and make changes, where considered necessary, to ensure that, at a minimum:

- Processes are in place and operating for documenting, monitoring, and resolving issues identified by Soldiers and their family members.

- Data documenting the issues that need to be corrected is evaluated for trends.

USARC Comments. Concur. The family members were addressed and procedures established in the Family Issues Memorandum dated 14 Mar 03. The processes in place to evaluate issues and concerns are through the Family Program Advisory Council (FPAC) and the Army Family Action Plan (AFAP). With the addition of new AFTB/AFAP staff positions, we will be able to educate more Soldiers and Families about these channels and obtain more issues for development. Those issues and concerns requiring immediate attention will be handled through the servicing Family Program Office. Projected target date for completion is 30 Sep 03.

Recommendation A-6. Establish a process to measure the effectiveness of the Family Support Program. As a minimum:

- Establish a plan for addressing specific Family Program issues on a recurring basis.
- Ensure that actions are taken to correct problems identified from studies and surveys conducted.

USARC Comments. Concur. Surveys will be on the newly developed website to continually evaluate and monitor if the Family Program is meeting the needs of the Soldiers and families. The USAR Family Program Office will provide trends to the Family Program Staff for adjustments and improvements to the program. Projected target date for completion is 31 Mar 04.

Recommendation A-7. Evaluate the impact volunteers have in implementing the Family Program. Determine whether more full-time personnel are needed to make the program more effective.

USARC Comments. Concur. More full-time personnel are needed to make the program more effective and to rely less on volunteers. A request for additional positions resulted in authorizations; however, funding has yet to be allocated. Projected target date for completion is 31 Dec 04.



DEPARTMENTS OF THE ARMY AND THE AIR FORCE
NATIONAL GUARD BUREAU
1411 JEFFERSON DAVIS HIGHWAY
ARLINGTON, VA 22202-3231

NGB-IR

18 AUG 2003

MEMORANDUM FOR Deputy Audit General, Forces and Financial Management,
ATTN: SAAG-FFF, 3101 Park Center Drive, Alexandria, VA 22302-1596

SUBJECT: Response to Army Audit Agency Draft Report, Family Support for Reserve
Component Soldiers in Extended Deployments (A-2001-FFF-0253)

1. The National Guard Bureau has reviewed subject report and our comments are at Enclosure 1.
2. Point of contact is Mr. Lane G. Haskew, NGB-IR-C, at DSN 327-0348 or 703-607-0348.

Encl
as

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "H Steven Blum".

H STEVEN BLUM
Lieutenant General, US Army
Chief, National Guard Bureau

RECOMMENDATIONS AND COMMENTS

Chief, National Guard Bureau And Commander, U.S. Army Reserve Command

A-1 Recommendation: Evaluate the process for disseminating information to Soldiers and their families to determine the most effective method for relaying the necessary information. As a minimum, require units to:

- Monitor attendance of Soldiers and their families at predeployment briefings.
- Ensure all families receive packets informing them of their benefits while their family member is deployed.

Command Comments:

The National Guard concurs with the recommendation. FORSCOM Regulation 500-3-3 states that this requirement is a Command responsibility and part of the Soldier Readiness Process (SRP). The Soldier Readiness Process (SRP) Checklist has an entry to validate/record family member attendance, activation of the Family Readiness group and telephone tree.

At the present time, the checklist is not automated which makes it difficult and very time consuming to track this information. With the release of the Reserve Component Automated System Mobilization Planning Data Viewer Version II in FY04 (the exact date has not been announced), the process will greatly improve our validation of those family members who have attended the training. It will also identify those family members who should be contacted and sent information packets.

While our goal is to notify 100% of the families, this is unrealistic with the current funding and unit personnel. However, we will issue an All-States letter re-emphasizing the need to document family member attendance at meetings and those to whom information packets were provided. This will be accomplished by 31 Dec 2003.

A-2 Recommendation: Take actions to have newsletters published and distributed on a monthly basis to all units mobilized or deployed and their families. As a minimum, the newsletters should include:

- Family social gatherings
- Informational briefings
- Updates and changes on Family Program benefits and services
- Family Program points of contact
- Activities of deployed family members

Command Comments:

The National Guard concurs with this recommendation and has made significant improvement in this area. Up until the current military operation, there has not always been a focus on benefits and entitlements for the National Guard soldiers and their families as it relate to their day to day activity as a MDAY soldier.

(1) The National Guard Family Program Office began providing a weekly electronic newsletter beginning in February 2003, to the State Family Program Coordinators which is called "News You Can Use" with information that covers Well-Being Issues, Medical and Dental Readiness, and training information.

(2) We have seen an increase of newsletters from the State Family Programs and also Family Readiness Group newsletters. The National Guard Family Program plans to evaluate the State Family Programs to determine the number of states currently creating a monthly newsletter. This will be completed no later than 4th Quarter FY03.

A-3 Recommendation: Make better use of the Family Program website for communicating with mobilized Soldiers and their families. As a minimum,

- Evaluate and update, where considered necessary, websites to make them more user-friendly.

- Have each primary website provide appropriate information relating to the family program. To include at least the following:
 - Family Program background (mission, goals, etc.).
 - General information on benefits and services with links to the appropriate website for more specific information
 - Key points of contact (name, location, phone number and electronic mail address)
 - General military information—e.g. location of military installations, military ranks and mobilization information—in many instances this may involve setting up hyperlinks to sites that would provide more specific information.
- Have States and Regional Support Commands establish a link to family program information on their home page.

Command Comments:

National Guard concurs with this recommendation. Our www.guardfamily.org website is comprehensive, user friendly, and has many state of the art features. We have continued to improve and update our National Guard Family website to include a comprehensive online solution which covers emotional health issues like stress, depression, anxiety, insomnia and substance abuse, as well as helping with family and work, health and fitness, and financial and legal issues.

We have also developed a website for our National Guard Youth, with information on the effects of deployments, health and fitness, a help section with topics on homework, career exploration, college preparation, guard benefits and scholarships. There is also on line training, which includes subjects on how to handle stress, money matters and dealing with violence. We have developed a monthly newsletter, which may be down loaded from the site. The site is www.guardfamilyyouth.org.

- A-4 Recommendation:** Establish a process that will make better use of video-teleconferencing equipment in assisting families to communicate with deployed family members. As a minimum, identify which mobilization/deployment sites can support video

teleconferencing and require that procedures be established for improving the linking of Soldiers with their families.

Command Comments:

The National Guard concurs with this recommendation. NGB is improving the operational capability of the network and is developing a VTC users guide for OCONUS VTCs. Currently the capability exist (within operational and security constraints) to provide OCONUSVTC to CONUS families. However it is up to the states to determine use of this capability. The target completion date for the user's guide is 30 April 2004.

A-5 Recommendation: Direct Family Program Chiefs to evaluate their current processes for addressing Soldier and/or family member concerns and make changes, where considered necessary, to ensure that, at a minimum:

- Processes are in place and operating for documenting, monitoring, and resolving issues identified by Soldiers and their family members.
- Data documenting the issues that need to be corrected is evaluated for trends.

Command Comments:

The National Guard concurs with this recommendation. With the release of the Reserve Component Automated System Mobilization Planning Data Viewer Version II in FY04 (the exact date has not been announced) units will an automated system to which maintains family information, creates telephone trees, mailing labels, document training hours and volunteer hours. It will also create an intake sheet to track and monitor issues from beginning to end. The program will also generate reports for tracking, documenting and evaluating trends at the unit level and higher.

A-6 Recommendation: Establish a process to measure the effectiveness of the Family Support Program. As a minimum:

- Establish a plan for addressing specific Family Program issues on a recurring basis.
- Ensure that actions are taken to correct problems identified from studies and surveys conducted.

Command Comments:

The National Guard concurs with this recommendation. The National Guard Family Program is developing an Accreditation process. Using the draft AR 608-1 Accreditation Process as our model, we will be able to measure the effectiveness of the Family Readiness Program (we no longer refer to our program as Family Support). We will begin the legal review of the process no later than 2nd Quarter FY04 and implementation by 1st Quarter FY05.

We agree with the need to address specific Family Program issues and to ensure actions are taken to correct those problems that are identified from studies and surveys. We have initiated and participated in several studies and surveys for this purpose to include the capability for online surveys on and website that are ongoing. What we are not able to do is to provide the manpower to facilitate and correct the issues that are identified.

With the addition of the new Army Family Team Building and Army Family Action Plan staff position, we will be able to educate more Soldiers and family members.

Immediate issues and concerns will continue to be handled by our State Family Programs and our Army National Guard Family Assistance Centers.

- A-7 Recommendation:** Evaluate the impact volunteers have in implementing the Family Program. Determine whether more full-time personnel are needed to make the program more effective.

Command Comments:

The National Guard strongly concurs with this recommendation. We continue to POM for additional funding for full-time personnel and we need emphasis and aggressive support from the Army and Department of Defense in order to accomplish this critical requirement. We have websites, 1-800 numbers, training, marketing products, etc., but we are terribly lacking in people. While volunteers have always been the backbone of our family programs, the military requirements since Sept 11, 2001, have escalated far beyond the capability of what was at one time a volunteer program.

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